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SUBJECT: UN AND GNU CONVENE THE FIRST EXPANDED HIGH-LEVEL COMMITTEE MEETING

REF: A) KHARTOUM 593  
B) KHARTOUM 589  
C) KHARTOUM 577

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (SBU) On May 7, the newly reconstituted High-Level Committee (HLC) met in Khartoum to discuss humanitarian operations and the current situation in Darfur. The Government of National Unity (GNU) Minister for Humanitarian Affairs Haroun Lual Ruun and UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes co-chaired the meeting, with participation of GNU ministries and Presidential Advisor Dr. Ghazi Salahudin, a U.S. delegation headed by Special Envoy Gration, the United Kingdom (UK), the European Union (EU), China, Russia, the African Union (AU), the League of Arab States (LAS), and additional international donors as permanent members for the first time. Committee members noted their appreciation for recent GNU measures to facilitate an improved operating environment and decrease bureaucratic impediments to humanitarian operations. Recognizing the urgent need to maintain an efficient aid operation in Darfur, participants discussed recent ministerial decrees and the role of the HLC to coordinate discussions on humanitarian program policies, monitoring mechanisms, national initiatives, and the operating environment. While the meeting represented a positive step forward in fostering increased participation among donors, countries with influence, and relevant government ministries in the HLC, the discussion was more focused on statements than substance. Donors noted that GNU commitments require additional follow-through. END SUMMARY

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HLC: Discussions on Progress and the Way Forward  
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¶2. (SBU) On May 7, Minister for Humanitarian Affairs Haroun Lual Ruun and UN Under-Secretary-General John Holmes co-chaired the first meeting of the expanded HLC. In the May 2 ministerial decree, Minister of Humanitarian Affairs Ruun expanded the permanent members of the HLC to include the GNU Ministries of Health, Irrigation, Finance, International Cooperation, Interior, and Defense; National

Security and Intelligence Service; regional organizations; and donor countries as permanent members for the first time. HLC participants included Director of the GNU Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) non-governmental organization (NGO) Section Ahmed Adam, GNU HAC Commissioner-General Hassabo Rahman, Sudanese Presidential Advisor Dr. Ghazi Salahudin, U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan J. Scott Gration, NGO representatives, and Ambassadors from the AU, China, Russia, the UK, the EU, and the League of Arab States (LAS). HLC meeting participants emphasized the need for joint efforts to address humanitarian issues and to create a predictable, less bureaucratic, and more accountable and efficient aid system in Darfur. They also agreed to enhance joint monitoring mechanisms, reiterated the need to improve security and staff safety, committed to continue to build national capacity, and agreed that humanitarian operations need to occur in a rules-based environment. Participants agreed the HLC will remain the primary forum for discussing policy and operational issues on humanitarian assistance in Darfur.

#### Progress on Commitments

¶3. (SBU) HLC meeting participants expressed appreciation for the GNU's recent steps to improve the operating environment in Darfur by issuing the April 16 and May 2 ministerial decrees and demonstrating commitment to the Special Envoy's framework. The representative from the People's Republic of China in particular emphasized the government's positive role in addressing issues in Darfur and commended the GNU's ability to coordinate with other governments. GNU officials emphasized the government's willingness to implement previous commitments, such as the 2007 Joint Communique, and noted that the international community and the GNU should use the HLC to continue to harmonize policies and monitor commitments. Although noting progress over the past month in beginning to rebuild trust between the government and NGOs and expressing appreciation towards the government's new cooperative tone, the majority of donors emphasized that a significant amount of work remains unfinished. Donors noted that commitments need to produce tangible results on

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the ground.

#### --Gaps in Assistance--

¶4. (SBU) Upholding the goal of helping vulnerable individuals as paramount, Special Envoy Gration, UN representatives, and U.K. Department for International Development (DFID) representative David Fish noted the importance of addressing gaps in assistance following the early March NGO expulsions. UN Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) for Sudan Ameerah Haq noted that the humanitarian community has been able to narrow gaps in shelter, food security, health, and water and sanitation since early March. However, recent efforts have not met the full range of services or the full standard prescribed by the UN. DSRSG Haq emphasized that the March joint GNU-UN donor assessment in Darfur only covered life-saving sectors and did not reach most rural areas. As a result, the joint mission did not assess the impact of the expulsions on livelihood, education, early recovery, or protection programs, which are important for meeting longer-term needs. According to DSRSG Haq, humanitarian assistance in most rural areas has almost ceased following the expulsions due to insecurity and limited number of humanitarian agencies. To effectively address gaps, donors emphasized the importance of an improved and predictable operating environment.

#### --Protection--

¶5. (SBU) GNU Minister of Humanitarian Affairs Haroun Lual Ruun and GNU HAC Commissioner-General Hassabo Rahman highlighted government concerns regarding protection activities in Darfur. Following statements from DFID representative Fish and Under-Secretary-General Holmes calling for a strengthened role for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in camp coordination and protection, the always obstructionist Hassabo stated that UNHCR has no legal role to provide or coordinate protection services. Hassabo reported that UNHCR's mandate includes provision of assistance to refugees rather than internally displaced persons (IDPs). Hassabo and Ruun noted that the government and the international community need to work towards a mutual understanding of humanitarian concepts

to resolve discrepancies, highlighting protection as a point of contention. Ruun further noted that prolonged aid could create a dependency syndrome in IDP camps, and Hassabo stated that humanitarian agencies only provide assistance to individuals in camps, not to returnees in rural areas. (Note: Tensions between the GNU and UNHCR have increased since 2004, when UNHCR expanded programs and assumed the role of UN cluster lead for protection and camp coordination. As cluster lead, UNHCR has attempted to expand operations from refugee camps in West Darfur into IDP camps in North and South Darfur. The GNU has strongly and repeatedly opposed the move and has placed increasing restrictions on UNHCR programs and staff, including prohibiting international UNHCR personnel from travelling to South Darfur since February 2009. End Note.)

#### --Staff Safety--

¶6. (SBU) Participants agreed to "do everything possible to ensure staff safety" as an essential element of addressing gaps and improving the operating environment within Darfur. Under-Secretary-General Holmes noted that the trust between NGOs and the government was severed following the government's decision to expel 13 international aid organizations in early March, creating a tense and uncertain operating environment for many international NGOs. Holmes emphasized that the humanitarian community should use the current crisis as an opportunity to rebuild confidence and mutual trust among NGOs and the government. Sudanese Presidential Advisor Dr. Salahudin repeatedly expressed gratitude for NGOs' work, stating that "we have expressed our appreciation for what they have done."

#### --Monitoring--

¶7. (SBU) Participants agreed on the importance of monitoring in ensuring progress on commitments. Special Envoy Gration reiterated that monitoring must be fully developed to demonstrate improvement and should track gains at the state- and federal-levels. In response to concerns regarding monitoring, Ahmed Adam, who also serves as the Head of the Joint Procedures Center (JPC), enumerated existing GNU monitoring mechanisms, including the HLC, federal and

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state Tripartite Joint Technical Committees (TJTCs), the General Directory of Procedures (GDP), and the JPC. To ease bureaucratic restrictions, Adam reported that the GNU has issued 29 decrees and TJTCs have met approximately 70 times, produced the GDP, visited the three Darfur states, and facilitated workshops on procedures to develop mutual trust and transparency among NGOs and the government.

In addition, the JPC is developing an electronic database linking all departments and procedures. Adam stated that in the future, TJTCs plan to commission a web-based tracking system, develop standards, strengthen partnerships, and build national NGO capacity.

(Note: In previous discussions with USAID field staff, Adam reported that the JPC launched the electronic database system in January 2009. However, NGOs have not yet received passwords to log into the database to track procedural progress. Implementing this system is expected to constitute a major step forward towards accurately tracking bureaucratic procedures, as NGOs will be able to review the status of their various applications and follow-up with the GNU HAC as needed. End Note.)

¶8. (SBU) GNU officials highlighted the importance of a harmonized system for monitoring and evaluating commitments, needs, and programs. Sudanese Presidential Advisor Salahudin emphasized that the government and international community should develop joint assessment methods so that the aid community does not exaggerate the extent of the problem. Participants agreed that joint GNU, donor, UN, and NGO teams should travel to Darfur monthly to monitor the situation prior to each HLC meeting and report to the HLC on staff safety, the operating environment, humanitarian needs, and programs.

The joint monitoring mechanism would provide the community with a common tool to validate actions and assess how the GNU and aid community can address remaining gaps. However, participants noted that joint monitoring cannot be a substitute for NGOs', UN agencies', and donors' own monitoring mechanisms.

#### --Building National Capacity--

¶9. (SBU) GNU officials and the GNU Ministry of Health noted that while international NGOs are welcome to continue providing assistance in Darfur, the international community must work towards strengthening national capacity. NGOs highlighted that organizations are working to build national capacity through partnerships with line ministries and community-based organizations and added that NGOs should have some choice in selecting national NGO partners. In addition, NGOs estimate that Sudanese nationals comprise approximately 90 percent of international NGO staff. The UN noted existing NGO efforts to build national capacity and expressed its willingness to continue to work with the government on this issue.

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Meeting with NGOs  
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¶10. (SBU) Prior to the HLC meeting, on May 6, Special Envoy Gration, CDA Fernandez, USAID's Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance Acting Assistant Administrator Dirk Dijkerman, USAID and Embassy staff, and Under-Secretary-General Holmes met with NGOs to discuss the operating environment and gaps in humanitarian assistance in northern Sudan resulting from the NGO expulsions. Participants emphasized recent GNU progress on reducing bureaucratic impediments and ongoing efforts to improve security by bringing Darfur's conflicting parties to negotiations in Doha, Qatar. NGO staff noted operational improvements following the April 16 and May 2 ministerial decrees, highlighting that out of 31 NGOs surveyed, the GNU had issued multiple re-entry visas to 26 staff from five NGOs. However, the majority of the multiple re-entry visas are for less than one year due to links between visa issuance and other bureaucratic procedures with varying timelines, such as resident visas. In addition, NGOs reported that the GNU HAC had completed 19 of the organizations' 31 technical agreements (TAs) since April 30. According to the NGOs, 60 percent of the organizations' TAs had reached the federal HAC as of May 7. In the April 16 ministerial decree, the GNU committed to complete all TAs by April 30.

¶11. (SBU) Despite continued operational challenges, participants underscored the importance of efforts to track implementation of current agreements and maintain pressure on the Sudanese government

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for cooperation and compliance. UN staff noted that the Special Envoy's framework has generated momentum for change and has created a window of opportunity for sustained progress. Noting that Sudan will remain a challenging working environment, Special Envoy Gration urged participants to continue to work under a positive and united front to ensure real progress, while also taking into account that the process requires time.

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COMMENT  
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¶12. (SBU) The expansion of the HLC to include permanent representation from the three main donors, the U.S., EU, and UK, as well as China represents a positive step forward in providing donors a more active role in improving the operating environment. However, following the meeting, NGOs and donors expressed dissatisfaction with the meeting's lack of concrete outputs. It remains to be seen if the new format HLC works better than the past one, which was repeatedly stymied by the HAC. The meeting largely focused on individual statements, with little time available to discuss or address issues. Participants did not discuss revising the terms of reference for the expanded HLC, leaving its mandate to continue to focus only on bureaucratic impediments in Darfur. In order to more effectively improve the operating environment in Darfur, the HLC needs to provide a venue for strategic policy discussions in a clearly defined scope. As Dr. Salahudin noted, "this is an auspicious moment in our country." To prevent future crises and respond to needs, the international community needs to seize this opportunity and strengthen the necessary mechanisms to improve operations in Darfur. Post will coordinate with other donors, the

UN, and the GNU so that the next HLC meeting scheduled for June will focus more on specific outputs and tangible results rather than just a general overview of the issues.

FERNANDEZ